

## THE KLONDIKE

The Klondike is a river of the Yukon Territory, Canada, and the name of the region, famous for its placer gold deposits, which surrounds the river and its tributaries. The Klondike flows into the Yukon River at Dawson.

Gold was first discovered in Alaska in 1862, and on the Stewart River in the Yukon in 1884, but it was not until August 16, 1896, that the American George Carmack and his Indian brothers-in-law Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie discovered the riches of the Klondike region. Acting on the advice of Robert Henderson, a Nova Scotian, they found coarse gold on Rabbit Creek, later called Bonanza Creek, and the news soon spread to Fortymile, scene of a previous gold strike. Immediately all the people in the neighbourhood made a rush for Bonanza Creek, which was staked from source to mouth. But it was not until the following summer that the outside world learned of the discovery, when a steamer reached Seattle with gold from the Klondike. In 1898 there was a great rush over the Chilkoot and White Passes and down the Yukon River to the Klondike. About 60,000 people from all parts of the world entered the district. In two years, the settlement of Dawson mushroomed from a few houses to a city of 30,000, but by 1921 its population was down to 975. In 1956, Dawson had 851 people. Other substantial settlements were at Grand Forks on Bonanza Creek, Gold Bottom on Hunker Creek, Paris and Cariboo on Dominion Creek, and 2 Below on Sulphur Creek.

In the wake of the Klondike rush came rapid development of the Yukon. Steamer services were established on the Yukon River, a railway from Skagway to Whitehorse was

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completed in 1900, and small towns developed at Carcross, on Lake Bennett, and at Whitehorse, now the Yukon's capital and largest city.

By the spring of 1899 all creeks of any importance in the Klondike had been staked, and, to the amusement of experienced miners, newcomers began staking claims on the hill-sides and benches. However, many of these hill claims proved to be immensely rich, and made fortunes for their owners. Between 1897 and 1904, more than \$100,000,000 in gold was obtained from the placers of the Klondike creeks. The highest yield for a single year, in 1900, was valued at \$22,000,000. There has since been a decline in value, but gold mining is still a profitable industry. In 1956, more than \$2,000,000 in gold was mined in the region.

In the early days, ground sluicing, underground "drifting" and the use of wooden "rockers", were the mining methods employed. Mining presented a special problem in the Klondike, because the ground beneath the loose overburden of gravel is frozen both winter and summer. Various devices were used for thawing the ground, but steam thawing, introduced as early as 1898, was the most common method. Steam, forced into iron pipes driven into the ground, escaped through holes in the pipes and thawed the surrounding pay-dirt.

The old methods disappeared, together with the miners who moved on to new fields as the more easily worked placer ground became exhausted. Today, huge mechanical dredges are able to separate from the creek beds gold which, by the old methods, could not be profitably mined. Cold water, pumped into the ground through pipes, is now used for thawing



the ground. The consolidation of mining properties under corporate bodies and the introduction of power machinery has placed the industry on a more stable basis. Now the Klondike holds the promise of a new source of wealth; asbestos deposits of commercial value were discovered recently.

Although the Klondike is not far from the Arctic regions, the climate is not so severe as commonly believed. The winters are rigorous and long, but the summers, though short, are pleasantly warm. The average daily temperature at Dawson is minus 16 degrees in January and 60 degrees in July. From November to March, the average temperature is minus 6 degrees.

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